
Building an Effective Hemispheric Counterterrorism Strategy

By

Ambassador J. Cofer Black

United States Department of State Coordinator for Counterterrorism

[The following are excerpts of the remarks to the Organization of American States Inter-American Committee Against Terrorism (CICTE) 4th Regular Session in Montevideo, Uruguay, January 29, 2004.]

We have come a long way since we last met in San Salvador. Counterterrorism cooperation in the hemisphere has continued to broaden and strengthen. The Special Summit of the Americas two weeks ago and the Organization of American States Special Conference on Hemispheric Security in October 2003 reaffirmed our leaders commitment to combating terrorism and its sources. And, the Inter-American Convention Against Terrorism went into effect in July of 2003. We firmly stand behind the Organization of American States and CICTE leading the charge to marshal our shared resources and expertise to combat terrorism. This meeting in Montevideo could not be more timely.

Over the past year, terrorists have struck brutally and callously across the globe. From Colombia to Saudi Arabia to Morocco to Indonesia, terrorists have indiscriminately killed men, women, and children. I know you all share with me in the tragic loss of our colleague Sergio de Mello.

The Western Hemisphere's experience with terrorism has been different than the traditional hotspots like the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and parts of Africa. Terrorism in our region has traditionally been a domestic threat. Colombia's Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), National Liberation Army (ELN), and United Self-Defense Forces of Columbia (AUC) have primarily engaged in local bombings, assassinations, and kidnappings. Sendero Luminoso's bloody thirty-year campaign left over 35,000 Peruvians dead. However, this trend is changing. Terrorists in this hemisphere are becoming more active in illicit transnational activities, principally the drug trade, but also arms trafficking, money laundering, contraband smuggling, and document and currency fraud. Not only do these provide sources of income, but terrorists also take advantage of their well-established underground supply routes to move funds, people and arms across borders, as well as to plan and conduct operations. And, the internet has given terrorists truly global reach to communicate, fundraise, and recruit. And, terrorists have not hesitated to make our hemisphere a battleground to advance their causes. The bombings of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires in 1992 and the Argentine-Jewish Cultural Center in 1994 painfully illustrated this. Middle Eastern terrorists, such as Hamas and Hizballah, have come to the Tri-Border Area of Paraguay, Brazil, and Argentina to raise funds and spread propaganda. The United States has arrested suspected al Qaeda cells in New York and Oregon.

Although we do not have confirmed, credible information of an al Qaeda presence in Latin America, we are aware that al Qaeda's global crime networks and fundraising operations are always seeking to extend their tentacles. The Western Hemisphere's lightly-defended soft targets our vibrant tourism industry, thriving aviation sector, and busy ports as well as systemic disparities between countries in border security, legal and financial regulatory regimes, and state presence create opportunities for terrorists to exploit. These domestic and international threats require action by all of us represented here today. For the United States, President Bush has outlined a National Strategy for Combating Terrorism, the goals of which are to:

-
- Defeat terrorist organizations of global reach by attacking their sanctuaries, leadership, finances, and command, control and communications;
 - Deny further sponsorship, support, and sanctuary to terrorists by cooperating with other states to take action against these international threats;
 - Diminish the underlying conditions that terrorists seek to exploit by enlisting the international community to focus its efforts and resources on the areas most at risk; and,
 - Defend the United States, its citizens and interests at home and abroad. The National Strategy highlights that success will only come through the sustained, steadfast, and systematic application of all elements of national power—diplomatic, financial, law enforcement, intelligence, and military.

Diplomacy facilitates all elements of national power. Diplomatic exchanges, such as this conference, build political will, strengthen international cooperation, and help us take the war to the terrorists. The global coalition assembled to remove the Taliban from Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein from Iraq was just one step. Diplomacy has led to the international community voicing their collective will to criminalize terrorism, its safe havening, and its financing in United Nations Security Council Resolution 1373 and the twelve international conventions and protocols against terrorism which, in coordination with US Executive Order 13224, have frozen \$120 million in over 167 countries.

Law enforcement and intelligence cooperation has led to two-thirds of the al Qaeda leadership being detained or killed, al Qaeda affiliates like Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and Hambali put behind bars, and 3,400 terrorists taken out of action worldwide.

In our hemisphere, cooperation has led to the extraditions of Hizballah financier Assad Ahmad Barakat from Brazil to Paraguay and Al-Said Hassan Mohkles from Uruguay to Egypt for his suspected role in the 1997 Luxor Temple massacre. The 3+1 Counterterrorism Dialogue is bringing together Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina, together with the United States, to combat terrorism financing and strengthen border security.

From the President of the United States down to Secretary Powell, and particularly to me, the United States is grateful for the cooperation of President Fox and the Mexican Government in assisting us to manage our aviation security concerns over the holidays. The United States is also grateful for the OAS for coming to our aid in the wake of September 11, 2001 by invoking the Rio Treaty, and the government of Canada for caring for so many of our people in the weeks following September 11, 2001. We are all doing so much together, but more needs to be done to ensure our hemisphere develops a well-coordinated and comprehensive counterterrorism strategy.

Countries that have not yet done so should ratify the Inter-American Convention Against Terrorism, the twelve United Nations conventions and protocols on terrorism, as well as other related instruments. And, the measures outlined in these legal instruments should be adopted into domestic legal systems. For our part, we are optimistic that the US Senate will move soon on ratification.

We encourage CICTE and its members to enhance collaboration with other OAS organizations, such as Inter-American Drug Information System (CICAD) and Inter-American Convention Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials (CIFTA); international organizations, such as the United Nations Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee (UNCTC), G-8's Roma-Lyon Group and Counterterrorism Action Group, and APEC; and, non-hemispheric countries, such as Spain and Israel.

We urge member states to continue to strengthen border security. The United States looks forward to working with many of you on US initiatives such as the US-VISIT, the Container Security Initiative, and the Terrorist Interdiction Program. President Bush has indicated that the greatest threat to peace today is the spread of weapons of mass destruction and the possibility that they may fall into the hands of terrorists. We are pleased so many countries here today have already indicated strong support for President Bush's Proliferation Security Initiative.

The United States has undergone considerable restructuring to enhance our ability to prevent, manage, and respond to terrorist threats and acts, establishing the Department of Homeland Security, the Terrorism Threat Integration Center, and the Terrorism Screening Center. And, we encourage CICTE members to enhance counterterrorism coordination in their governments. We urge member states to develop integrated incident management and crisis management capabilities. The United States also strongly supports efforts to share information on cyber threats and attacks, and for member states to develop a Computer Security Incident Response Team. We also encourage member states to diminish underlying conditions that create opportunities for terrorists to exploit. As Secretary of State Colin Powell has said about poverty, which applies to other underlying conditions such as corruption, religious conflict and ethnic strife, it breeds frustration, hopelessness and resentment and ideological entrepreneurs know how to turn those emotions into either support for terrorism or acquiescence to it.

The reality of counterterrorism, in which I have been engaged most of my career, is that it depends on relationships, communication, free flow of information, and transparency. We can prevent and disrupt terrorist activity by working together to secure our borders, strengthen customs enforcement, and develop strong legal and financial regulatory systems to criminalize terrorism and terrorism finance. By marshalling our resources to provide capacity-building assistance, we can deter terrorists from targeting weaker states or from using them for safe havens or fundraising. And by sharing information, as well as coordinating joint investigations and efforts to bring terrorists to justice, we can deal a serious blow to terrorism.

And, that is why we are here. First and foremost to develop ways to work together to defend men, women and children against terrorism. But, also to develop ways to cooperate in defending our critical infrastructure and commerce to ensure our economies grow and are healthy. And, to establish joint mechanisms to preserve that which we all hold dearest and which terrorists try to take away: freedom, liberty, and democracy.

Close to seventy years ago, US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, addressing a Conference on Democracy here in Montevideo, provided sage advice that I think is applicable to what we are doing at this conference. He said, "We seek new remedies for new conditions . . ." Sometimes the remedies succeed, and sometimes they must be altered or improved. But the net result is that we move forward. The United States is committed to moving forward with CICTE to enhance hemispheric counterterrorism cooperation. Let us continue our strong partnership against terror. And, when we meet again next year in Port of Spain, let us look forward to celebrating another year of accomplishments.